

Parent-infant interactions and early prosocial behaviour

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Introduction

Prosocial behaviours (PSB), actions intended to help others, first appear in infancy.

Individual differences in PSB are impacted by parental interaction:

Parental empathy: Empathic parents have infants who are more likely to share (Xu et al., 2016)

Parental mental state talk: Increased mental state and emotion talk linked to higher helping in toddlers (Brownell et al., 2013)

Parental scaffolding: Parental encouragement, praise, and sensitive teaching associated with higher PSB in infants (Dahl et al., 2016; Hammond & Carpendale, 2015)

We know very little about the impact of early parent-infant interactions and the first emergence of PSB, thought to occur before 6 months of age (Hammond et al., 2017).

The present study reports on initial data collection, in 3 months-old infants, as part of a larger longitudinal study exploring the emergence of PSB.

Methodology

At each time point

Questionnaires

Demographics
Social, motor, and cognitive development (e.g. Ages and Stages Questionnaire)

PSB (e.g. Everyday Helping Questionnaire)

Videoconferencing

Structured interaction tasks

-Prosocial behaviours (e.g. Marker task; Clothing task)

Unstructured interaction (e.g. Free play)

Repeat Every Month

Results

So far, questionnaire were filled and video sessions were conducted for 13 participants in phase 1. Qualitative analysis of the recorded videos was used to establish the following results. Three parent- infant interaction types were identified.

Type A: Warm, Expressive Parent

When engaging with researcher:

- Alternates interaction between the researcher and the infant (e.g. smiling at baby)
- Pays attention to the infant

During structured interactions and free play:

- Engages with baby as-if 3 month-old is a conversational partner
- Positive emotion in facial expressions and language (e.g. parentese), affection
- Praise and encouragement
- Interaction is very natural
- Mother seems to really enjoy the free play

Infants' behaviour

When parent (mother) is engaging with researcher during study:

- Baby looks at mother majority of time
- Tries to initiate interactions with mother

During structured interactions and free play

- Baby is looking at the mother almost all the time
- Interacting with mother
- Smiling and laughing a lot
- Making happy voices
- Plays with toys and is active

Type B: Intermediately Expressive Parent

When engaging with researcher:

- Doesn't look or interact with infant at all
- Doesn't pay attention to the infant

During structured interactions:

Very little talking, smiling, and warmth

During Free Play:

- Low amounts of positive emotion in facial expressions and language (e.g. parentese)
- No praise
- Interaction is not very natural
- Mother doesn't seem to enjoy the free play

Infants' behaviour

When parent (mother) is engaging with researcher during study:

- Baby looks at mother few times
- Doesn't try to initiate interactions

During structured interactions and free play

- Baby seems neutral (neither looking towards mother nor looking away, looks at mother once or twice)
- Not interacting with mother
- Doesn't smile at mother at all
- Doesn't make any happy voices
- Looks at toys, but little play

Type C : Disengaged or Unexpressive Parent

When engaging with researcher:

- Doesn't look or interact with infant at all
- Doesn't pay attention to the infant

During structured interactions:

No talking, smiling, or any warmth

During Free Play:

- Effort in exerting positive emotion in facial expressions, no parentese
- No praise
- Interaction is stilted or unnatural
- Mother doesn't seem to enjoy the free play

Infants' behaviour

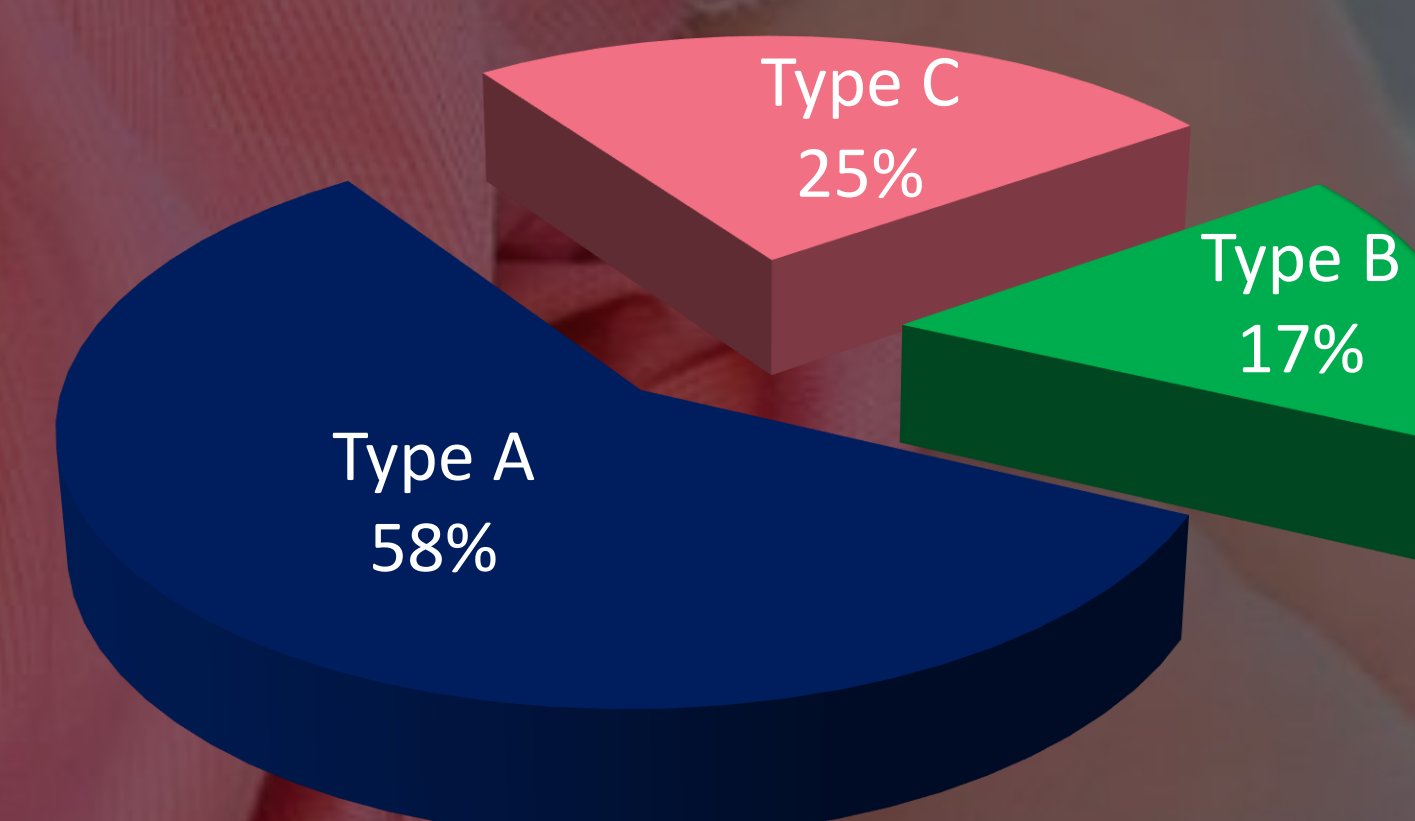
When parent (mother) is engaging with researcher during study:

- Baby doesn't look at mother at all
- Doesn't try to initiate interactions

During structured interactions and free play

- Baby is avoiding mother (looking in the opposite direction)
- Not interacting with mother
- Doesn't smile at mother at all
- Doesn't make any happy voices
- Doesn't look at toys or play with them
- Irritated

ASQ communication skills (1= yes; 2 = sometimes; 3 = not yet)	Mean	Standard deviation
Does your baby chuckle softly?	1.67	0.78
After you have been out of sight, does your baby smile or get excited when he sees you?	1.00	0.00
Does your baby stop crying when she hears a voice other than yours?	2.00	0.74
Does your baby make high-pitched squeals?	1.58	0.79
Does your baby laugh?	1.50	0.67
Does your baby make sounds when looking at toys or people?	1.08	0.29



Discussion

Small number of cases suggest relevant parental differences. Although a small number of cases were studied, there were clear differences in parent-infant interactions. Three typologies were formed based mainly on the mother's warmth and the baby's level of engagement.

Parental interaction styles related to infants' behaviour. Parental interaction style seemed connected to baby's level of engagement.

Quantitative data reveals differences in infants' social interaction. The quantitative data also showed individual differences in babies social interaction styles.

Typologies resemble categories from prior research. The typologies seem to fit with some categories identified by the previous literature.

Future Directions

As this research moves forward, we will refine these broad typologies to better reflect the parent-infant interactions. Moreover, we expect that Type A might lead to earlier prosocial behaviour in these infants since parental empathy, parental praise, and emotional encouragement are correlated with a greater likelihood of helping behaviour in older infants. In the future, we will need to see if these factors are actually predicative of early PSB emergence which is suspected to emerge around 5-7 months (Hammond et al., 2017).

Importance

In general, PSB increases an individual's likeability which in turn improves their self-esteem and life satisfaction. Furthermore, each individual's PSB is essential for the the prospering of our community (The whole is equal to the sum of it's parts). For the aforementioned reasons, it is crucial that we know the significance of early parent-infant interactions on the development of prosocial behavior to be able to educate parents and increase their awareness about this issue.

References

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Hammond for his guidance and UROP for giving me this opportunity

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